

Reorientation in Supervisory Responsibilities

1. Mr. McCone's introductory comments on this reorientation program were helpful in conveying an idea of its importance. Mr. Echols' keynote speech thereafter was a good statement of the purpose of the meeting and a good general presentation of basic supervisory responsibilities. He made clear that good supervision is more than just assignment and review of work. Colonel White's discussion of supervisory responsibilities was effective and interesting. His examples I thought were good. Also, the panel discussions were well done although some of the questions had little or no relationship to supervisory responsibilities. Dr. Tietjen's lecture also, while presented well, seemed to have little relationship to supervisory responsibilities.

2. I do not think enough emphasis was given in the speeches or panel discussions to what are good supervisory principles and to the details of how good supervision is achieved, i. e. how good supervisor-employee relations are established, how employees are encouraged to give their best efforts, how difficult working relationships are resolved, how to insure uniform and equitable rating of employees, how to secure effective communication between employees and supervisors and between supervisory levels, and how to secure cooperation and acceptance of unpleasant supervisory decisions. Much of this, of course, can probably be covered better in supervisory training courses, as Colonel White pointed out, but I do not believe at the present time it is. In the presentation, there appeared to be no consistent or logical development of ideas which would make it possible for a supervisor to review a problem in the light of basic supervisory principles and come up with the right answer.

3. I think a good deal of thought should be given to what are the basic supervisory requirements or principles for all supervisor-employee relationships and then discussions should consist of examples illustrating each of these principles, e. g.:

Rule: A good supervisor does not take advantage of his authority to do things that he would consider illegal or unethical for an employee.

Illustration: A supervisor who borrowed a government vehicle for his personal use.

Rule: A good supervisor does not use privileged information in his own interests.

Illustration: An officer who tried to secure his own reassignment to the U.S. through use of privileged information on treatment of enlisted men.

Rule: A good supervisor makes sure that an employee understands what his assignment is.

Illustration: It is not sufficient just to tell him what to do. Get him to explain his understanding of the assignment before he leaves to undertake it.

Rule: A good supervisor does not rate all employees alike because he wants to be considered a good fellow but according to his evaluation of merit supported by sound logic.

Illustration:

Rule: Likewise, a good supervisor is completely impartial in his ratings, discounting any personal liking he has for an employee, the fact that he plays golf with him, etc.

Illustration:

Rule: A good supervisor maintains good discipline without undue emphasis on minor infractions.

Illustration:

Rule: A good supervisor insures that an employee always knows where he stands - what are his good points and what are his shortcomings.

Illustration:

Rule: A good supervisor does not evade his responsibilities by referring decisions higher up which he can make himself.

Illustration:

Rule: On the other hand, a good supervisor must recognize decisions and commitments which must be made by higher authority.

Illustration:

Rule: A good supervisor is not married to his prerogatives and tries to avoid resentment about being overruled or by passed by higher authority.

Illustration:

Rule: On the other hand, a good second or higher echelon supervisor who must overrule a lower-level supervisor will be careful to explain his reasons to the lower-level supervisor.

Illustration:

Rule: A good supervisor supports policy decisions and programs established by higher authority regardless of his personal feelings.

Illustration:

These are only suggested principles. No doubt, many better ones can be stated. Obviously, many rules will call to mind illustrations and, on the other hand, many rules can be formulated from illustrations.

4. Greater emphasis should be given to the idea that no one is perfect and that any supervisor can improve. It would help for the lecturers to illustrate some principles with their own mistakes - possibly old ones which they are now willing to admit, since this approach will reveal their human qualities and will help lower-level supervisors to examine their own consciences and try to correct their own shortcomings. The major fault, it seems to me, is that supervisors listen to such presentations under a sort of semi-bored compulsion, in the belief that it does not apply to them but to some anonymous "Joe Doakes" and they go back to their offices and continue to make the same mistakes. Any program for supervisors, if it is to accomplish real results, should compel a supervisor to re-evaluate his own actions as a supervisor, to admit to himself that he has made mistakes and to follow better principles in the future.


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